Don’t Cause One Another to Stumble

Life Together 2026 – Romans 14:13-23 (CGS #5)

INTRODUCTION – As we continue to consider what “life together” looks like, we eventually have to ask, “What happens when we disagree?” This was a huge deal in the Roman church because there was a growing disagreement, even threatening to break up the church. The disagreement centered around meat and wine. One group said you couldn’t eat the meat or drink the wine because they had come from pagan temples and therefore eating and drinking it was participating in the worship of pagan idols. The other group said that our freedom in Christ means we can eat and drink anything. Apparently, they had written to Paul and asked, “Which group is right?” In Romans 14, Paul, in his customary way, essentially says, “It’s more complicated than that.”

Early in the chapter he says, “Don’t quarrel over opinions” (14:1), “Don’t despise one another” (14:3), and later, “Don’t pass judgment on one another” (14:13). How do we avoid making these mistakes? By laying down your preferences to avoid trampling on the consciences of your brothers and sisters. In Romans 14, we see Paul exploring two concepts: **Liberty and Conscience**. Clearly, the consciences of some Roman believers were being violated when they were asked to eat the meat and drink the wine. We don’t know if they came from a Jewish background or a Gentile background, if it was really the Holy Spirit or just a result of their past experiences, but we know they felt some conviction. They saw eating the meat and drinking the wine as sin, and anyone who does those things is condemning themselves. Meanwhile, other Roman believers were fully adopting their newfound freedom in Christ. They’d been given the liberty to eat and drink whatever they wanted, as long as they gave thanks to God for it and honored him with it (14:6).

Paul says, “Yes, you have been given liberty, nothing is clean or unclean in itself (14:14; 17; 20), but for the sake of food, don’t trip up the faith of your brother or sister (14:20-21).” Saying, “I don’t care how it makes you feel, I’m going to eat what I want” is just about the *least* loving thing you could say to a struggling brother or sister. “If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love” (14:15). Paul’s instructions here are for both the liberty group and the conscience group: Don’t despise the one who eats, and don’t despise the one who abstains (14:3), the kingdom of God isn’t about food and drink, but about righteousness, peace, and joy (14:17). Essentially, Paul is saying, “You’re missing the point.”

It can be easy for us to look back at the 1st century Roman church and agree with Paul that this disagreement shouldn’t have become a big deal. We can dismiss it as petty and small. Who cares what you eat? But if we apply it to our modern day, it starts to take on a whole new level of significance that, for some of us, might be a little uncomfortable.

What are some opinions you’ve given too much importance to? What positions have you elevated to the point that it makes you look down on believers who disagree with you? Obviously, there are theological beliefs that are primary for alignment with biblical Christianity (the Trinity, the sinlessness of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, etc.). But aside from these primary beliefs, are there any secondary beliefs that, if someone disagrees with you, you start to doubt their faith? (Things like the age of the earth, the timing of the millennium when Christ returns, the role of pastors/elders, etc.) How about political opinions? Now does it start to feel more real? All of us, regardless of our personal beliefs, are called to lay down our differences and pursue peace and mutual upbuilding with our brothers and sisters in Christ (14:19).

GETTING STARTED – Discuss this question as a group: When have you seen differences of opinion escalate into harsh disagreement? When have you seen it lead to growth and peace?

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage. It's important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below (O.P.A.).

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday-Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

DISCUSS – Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following discussion questions:

1. What did you hear God's Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. Paul commands us not to pass judgment on one another. What does judgment mean in this context?
4. What are some opinions Christians can disagree on? What are some opinions we can't disagree on? How can you tell the difference?
5. We might not disagree about food or drink sacrificed to idols anymore, but what are some issues that divide the church today?
6. What can we do as Christians to de-escalate the infighting and "pursue peace and mutual upbuilding"?
7. What's an opinion you hold that causes you to look down on believers who disagree with you?